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Hollingworth, Miles: Ludwig Wittgenstein

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Other chapters engage more intimately with psychoanalytical principles. Chapter 2 argues that Yudhiṣṭhira, one of the epic's protagonists, shows signs of what the psychoanalyst André Green in 1983 called the "dead mother complex," a psychological reaction to a mother who is emotionally withdrawn. Chapter 3 carries the theme forward by tracing such "dead mothers" through multiple generations of the epic's characters. The notion of the "dead mother" is intriguing, but as Hildebeitel framed some of the epic's matriarchs (Gaṅgā, Kuntī) in this way, I found myself wanting him also to acknowledge the fact that the *Mahābhārata*'s central narrative rests on a broken patriline—that is, on the repeated failure of men to become fathers. Is this weighting imported from Freud's Vienna? Besides, if you focus only on the failure of the *Mahābhārata*'s mothers to demonstrate closeness with their mythical children, you're apt to miss the epic's masterful and moving depictions of affectionate fathers (Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Arjuna). These fathers' love for their sons eventually morphs into agony. Look too hard for complexes in the *Mahābhārata* and you're in danger of missing its full complexity.

If, by its own famous advertisement, the *Mahābhārata* encompasses everything that exists, then surely it can make room for Freudian psychoanalysis. But should it? Hildebeitel's earlier scholarship helped a whole generation of Western scholars to appreciate just how much the world of the *Mahābhārata*—the Sanskrit epic itself, and the many *Mahābhārata* traditions that are its children—had to offer all on its own. The best parts of *Freud's Mahābhārata* do the same.

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HOLLINGWORTH, MILES. *Ludwig Wittgenstein*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. xix+275 pp. \$34.95 (cloth).

The striking remarks on Christianity scattered throughout Wittgenstein's writings are usually treated as personal views unconnected to the substance of his philosophy. Miles Hollingworth sees in them the key to it, and to the life of the man; his biography makes Wittgenstein's life and work "speak with a single voice" (3). He doesn't find a specialized philosophy of religion in Wittgenstein, nor an apologetic for a creed, but rather the working out of a perspective on our predicament, where we stand in a place of tension and decision between life in this world, the Devil's world of civilization and "mental intelligence," and a life of love, following Christ in the "physical intelligence" of our hearts, our muscles and blood (82–98 ff.). This reading may seem perverse, but Hollingworth quotes many Wittgenstein passages that suggest something like this; a struggle against "the *dehumanizing* effect of purely mental intelligence" (152).

Mental intelligence, on which Western, techno-scientific civilization has grown fat and proud, presumes to know reality through fact-finding and conceptualizations, measurements and conclusions. It appears to uncover endless, dazzlingly new truths, but really only ever shows us the *kind* of thing we ourselves, by adopting a particular method and approach to reality, have determined it shall show us. Insofar as "'knowledge' is a pact we make in advance with the metric of our seeing" (164), "Western knowledge can only tell you what you already know" (183). The claim that science reveals What Really Exists is empty. It simply announces one's choice to look at life through *this* "pair of glasses" (201), and pretending differently is "groundless moralism . . . ideological *fiat*" (26). And similarly for similar claims for religious doctrine. The dispute between scientists and theologians is false: "If their object is to use their brains better than each other, then they . . . are as one" (161). By making the emptiness of such truth claims clear, Wittgenstein "manages to call the bluff on the whole

long history of Western philosophy" (9) and raises the question whether this pretense to impersonal Truth is our way of fearfully "running from revelation" (239), from going someplace different. "The question 'What is truth?' is really the question 'Where have you been' (with whom have you conversed?)" (140), but mental intelligence wants us to "desist from looking into each other's eyes and souls" (212).

This isn't the comfortable postmodern idea that we can only tell stories. Quite the contrary. Mental intelligence demands precisely that one "become *the narrator*" (16), and "shaming and outing of the narrator" was "the whole point . . . of Wittgenstein's philosophy" (18). The stories we tell about ourselves are "death traps" insofar as "the story always becomes more important than the subject" (6). What matters isn't the names and details a story contains, "but the form and structure by which it does the containing," and even if "Christ [himself] walks the earth within this . . . scheme of containment . . . he will have to play his *indicated* part" (11–12). Stories are supposed to explain how we got to be who we are, to provide our biography and identity, but "the very idea of identity (=) is sin and evil" (94), and "the Devil is the great biographer" (96). Hence, Hollingworth's own book is really an antibiography, mentioning the facts and famous eccentricities of Wittgenstein's life without presuming to explain anything or nail Wittgenstein to an identity but rather always raising "the question of how far we can really know anyone by this procedure [of biography]," this "supreme test-case of the scope and limitations" of mental intelligence's way of knowing (149).

But what else is there than telling stories, knowing facts and causes, reaching logical conclusions, and determining identities? There's the encounter of love, where everything is always *now* and *new*, for "each love is its own world" (158), and if lovers speak, they speak "a *one-time* language, afterwards forgotten" (180). The "mysticism" (6) Hollingworth finds in Wittgenstein goes beyond the classic idea of the inaccessibility to reason of the individual soul's communion with God precisely insofar as it focuses on how human beings are moved by *each other* in ways unrepresentable by rules of reason and logic. Hollingworth sees the "language games" of Wittgenstein's later philosophy as a "brilliant mockery" of the idea of language having set rules—hence as something "a rod and wire machine could replicate" (184). At a deeper level—for there are any games at all only because living human beings play with each other—Wittgenstein shows how language "only works because humans can already interact at a level below it or above it" (162). That is, he shows that "the language used between us is in itself irrelevant. It is the effort that you make to feel my original tilt of soul that matters" (188). Language is only "a stick that we prod the other person with to get their attention and to get them looking into our face. What happens after that is magical . . . each word between two human beings is like a doorway of escape to another world. . . . Words are natural, whatever it is that passes between us is supernatural" (188). In other words, Wittgenstein's view of language celebrates love, "for it is love in all its degrees that we find in each other's faces . . . Wittgenstein is famed for writing nearly nothing about his love life. Yet now we realize that the whole of his philosophy was about it" (158).

This strikes me as crucial and basically right, although—or because—it opens up huge new questions. In Christian terms, questions of this order will arise if God truly is to be the God of love. Some other things Hollingworth says I find unclear, and some confused. Space only permits mentioning one: his (apparent) view of sexuality as necessarily "the point at which the endlessness of love's dreaming is made to shatter against a single lesson in friction and plumbing" (207) and of "Wittgenstein's antagonistic and ascetic relationship to sex [. . . as] the living out of his philosophy" (219). Isn't this just how sex appears when looked at lovelessly, divorced from yourself and the one you embrace? Doesn't Hollingworth here forget precisely his own main (Wittgensteinian) point, that things decide nothing in themselves, impersonally, but the question is how I, personally, relate to you?

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